

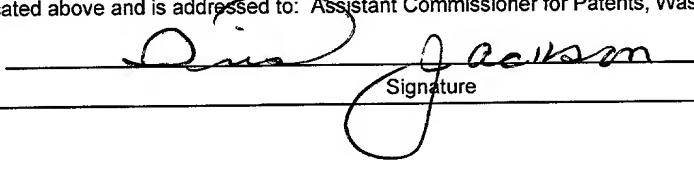
APPLICATION FOR UNITED STATES LETTERS PATENT

for

FISCHER-TROPSCH TAIL-GAS UTILIZATION

by

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BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

The process and advantages of gasifying hydrocarbonaceous material into synthesis gas are generally known in the industry. In high temperature gasification processes, synthesis gas is commonly produced from gaseous combustible fuels, such as natural gas and/or associated gas, liquid organic fuels or combustible solid organic fuels, such as coal, residual petroleum, wood, tar sand, shale oil, and municipal, agriculture or industrial waste. The gaseous or liquid or solid combustible organic fuels are reacted with a reactive oxygen-containing gas, such as air, enriched air, or pure oxygen, and a temperature modifier, such as steam, in a gasification reactor to obtain the synthesis gas in a oxygen deficient environment.

In the reaction zone of a gasification reactor, the contents will commonly reach temperatures in the range of about 1,700° F (930° C) to about 3,000° F (1650° C), and more typically in the range of about 2,000° F (1100° C) to about 2,800° F (1540° C). Pressure will typically be in the range of about 1 atmosphere (100 KPa) to about 250 atmospheres (25,000 KPa), and more typically in the range of about 15 atmospheres (1500 Kpa) to about 150 atmospheres (1500 KPa).

In a typical gasification process, the synthesis gas will substantially comprise hydrogen (H₂), carbon monoxide (CO), and lesser quantities of impurities, such as water (H₂O), carbon dioxide (CO₂), carbonyl sulfide (COS) and hydrogen sulfide (H₂S). The synthesis gas is commonly treated to remove or significantly reduce the quantity of impurities, particularly H₂S, COS, and CO₂ before being utilized in downstream processes. A number of acid gas removal systems are commercially available and are known in the art. Selection of an appropriate acid gas removal system will usually depend on the degree of sulfur compounds and carbon dioxide removal required and by the operating pressure of the acid gas removal system. Determinations as to what type of acid gas system to use can easily be determined by one skilled in the art of acid gas removal from syngas.

28 It is well known in the art that synthesis gas, also commonly referred to as syngas,
29 can be converted to hydrocarbons in the presence of a variety of transition metal
30 catalysts. Such metals are commonly called Fischer-Tropsch catalysts, and are known to
31 catalyze the conversion of CO and H₂ to hydrocarbons. Common catalysts are cobalt and

1 iron on an alumina support. Other Group VIII metals such as ruthenium and osmium are
2 also active. Other single metals that have been investigated as catalysts include rhenium,
3 molybdenum, and chromium. The activities of these catalysts are commonly enhanced
4 by the addition of a variety of metals, including copper, cerium, rhenium, manganese,
5 platinum, iridium, rhodium, molybdenum, tungsten, ruthenium or zirconium, among
6 others. The general chemistry of the much studied Fischer-Tropsch synthesis is as
7 follows:



10 The types and amounts of reaction products obtained via Fischer-Tropsch
11 synthesis varies upon many conditions, such as reactor type, process conditions, and type
12 of Fischer-Tropsch synthesis catalyst used. There are four main types of F-T reactors
13 being used commercially: tubular fixed bed reactors, entrained bed reactors, fixed-
14 fluidized bed reactors and slurry bubble column reactors. These reactors can operate in
15 both high and low temperature Fischer Tropsch processes. There are generally two types
16 of Fischer Tropsch synthesis catalysts, cobalt based and iron based catalysts. Typical
17 products of the Fischer-Tropsch reaction include hydrocarbons from C₁ to C₂₀₀ or higher,
18 with the bulk of the hydrocarbons product being in the C₁ to C₅₀ range with chain limiting
19 catalyst. Most of the hydrocarbons produced are mixtures of olefins and paraffins. The
20 Fischer-Tropsch reaction also produces varying amounts of carbon dioxide, water, and
21 oxygenated components, including acids such as acetic acid, formic acid, propionic acid;
22 alcohols such as methyl alcohol, ethyl alcohol, propyl alcohol, and longer chained
23 alcohols; aldehydes, ketones and esters. Typically, these oxygenated components
24 comprise 1 to 20 weight percent of the Fischer-Tropsch reaction product, and because of
25 their water-soluble nature are commonly found in the wastewater product of a Fischer-
26 Tropsch reactor. Some of the oxygenated compounds are also found in hydrocarbon
27 phase. The amount of gaseous hydrocarbons, paraffin, olefins, CO₂, oxygenates, liquid
28 hydrocarbons, water, etc. depends on the type of reactor, catalyst employed and process
29 conditions. For example, iron catalysts generally produce longer chain hydrocarbons that
30 are more olefinic, produce less amount of water, higher amounts of oxygenates and
31 higher amounts of CO₂ as compared to cobalt catalyst. The Fischer-Tropsch reaction

1 products are commonly divided into separate streams of tail-gas, liquid hydrocarbons,
2 and wastewater.

3 The product from a Fischer-Tropsch reactor typically comprise water vapor, CO₂,
4 N₂, unreacted syngas (H₂ and CO), gaseous hydrocarbons (C₁ –C₅), liquid hydrocarbon
5 (C₅+) products, and various oxygenates. Generally, most of the water vapor, liquid
6 hydrocarbon products and oxygenates are condensed and separated. This leaves the
7 desired liquid hydrocarbon product and the oxygenate containing wastewater. The liquid
8 hydrocarbon is processed in downstream product upgrading section and waste water is
9 usually sent to a water treatment step.

10 What remains is the tail-gas, which is comprised of water vapor, CO₂, CH₄, N₂,
11 unreacted syngas (H₂ and CO), and vapor hydrocarbon products. The F-T tail gas can be
12 recycled back to the gasification unit or can be recycled to the Fischer-Tropsch reactor
13 inlet or burned as fuel.

14 Electric power can be generated efficiently in integrated gasification combined
15 cycle (IGCC) systems. For IGCC applications, the synthesis gas is fired as fuel to a gas
16 turbine system that drives a generator to produce electric power. Hot turbine exhaust can
17 be passed to a heat recovery system to produce high pressure steam which can be
18 expanded through a steam turbine to drive another electric generator to produce
19 additional power. Such IGCC systems generate electricity in an efficient and
20 environmentally sound manner.

21 The production of chemicals or liquid fuels from a portion of the synthesis gas,
22 such as in a Fischer-Tropsch reactor, in a IGCC system is also well known and has the
23 advantages of common operating facilities and economy of scale in the coproduction of
24 electric power and chemicals. Several references in the background art describe existing
25 technology for combined chemical plant/IGCC power plant operations.

26 SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

27 The present invention deals with the handling of the tail-gas product from a
28 combined gasification and Fischer-Tropsch plant. There are three major alternatives for
29 the tail-gas, the first being recycling the tail-gas as additional feed to the gasification unit.
30 The second alternative is processing the tail-gas in a CO₂ removal unit and then recycling
31 the tail-gas back to the feed of the Fischer-Tropsch reactor to improve the liquid product

1 yield. Finally, the third alternative is to send the tail-gas to a power production unit for
2 the generation of electric power.

3 BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

4 FIG. 1 is a schematic diagram of one embodiment of the present invention.

5 DESCRIPTION OF ILLUSTRATIVE EMBODIMENTS

6 . The feedstock for a gasification process is usually a hydrocarbonaceous material,
7 that is, one or more materials, generally organic, which provide a source of hydrogen and
8 carbon for the gasification reaction. In the present invention, carbonaceous fuel is
9 obtained and prepared for feeding to a gasification reactor. Carbonaceous fuel is any
10 solid, liquid, and gaseous combustible organic material as single feed or combinations
11 feed that can be used as feedstock to a gasification process for synthesis gas production.

12 The extent of feed preparation step will vary depending on the composition and
13 physical nature of the feedstock. Generally, solid carbonaceous fuels will need to be
14 liquefied with oil or water prior to feeding to the gasifier. Liquid and gaseous
15 carbonaceous fuels may be suitable for direct feed to the gasifier, but can be pre-treated
16 for removal of any impurities that might be present in the feed.

17 After the feed preparation step, the carbonaceous fuel is sent to a gasification
18 reactor, or gasifier. In the gasifier, the carbonaceous fuel is reacted in an oxygen
19 deficient environment with a reactive oxygen-containing gas, such as air or substantially
20 pure oxygen having greater than about 90 mole percent oxygen, or oxygen enriched air
21 having greater than about 21 mole percent oxygen. Substantially pure oxygen as
22 produced in an air separation unit or produced by membrane technology is preferred.
23 The partial oxidation of the hydrocarbonaceous material is completed, advantageously in
24 the presence of a temperature control moderator such as steam, in a gasification zone to
25 obtain hot synthesis gas.

26 In the gasification zone of a gasifier, the contents will commonly reach
27 temperatures in the range of about 1,700° F (927° C) to 3,000° F (1649° C), and more
28 typically in the range of about 2,000° F (1093° C) to 2,800° F (1538° C). Pressure will
29 typically be in the range of about 1 atmospheres (101 kPa) to about 250 atmospheres
30 (25331 kPa), and more typically in the range of about 15 atmospheres (1520 kPa) to
31 about 150 atmospheres (15,199 kPa), and even more typically in the range of about 40

1 atmospheres (6080 kPa) to about 80 atmospheres (8106 kPa). See US Patent 3,945,942
2 describing a partial oxidation burner assembly. See US Patent 5,656,044 describing a
3 method and an apparatus for the gasification of organic materials. See also US Patents
4 5,435,940, 4,851,013, and 4,159,238 describing a few of the many gasification processes
5 known in the prior art. The entire disclosures of the above referenced patents are hereby
6 incorporated by reference and relied upon.

7 The hot gasification process product, synthesis gas, or syngas, comprises carbon
8 monoxide and hydrogen. Carbon Monoxide is a used as a major building block for many
9 chemicals. Hydrogen is a commercially important reactant for hydrogenation reactions.
10 Other materials often found in the synthesis gas include hydrogen sulfide, carbonyl
11 sulfide, carbon dioxide, ammonia, cyanides, and particulates in the form of carbon and
12 trace metals. The extent of the contaminants in the syngas is determined by the type of
13 carbonaceous feed, the type of gasifier, and the gasifier operating conditions. In any
14 event, the removal of these contaminants is critical to make gasification a viable process.
15 Hydrogen sulfide, removal is particularly important.

16 As the product gas is discharged from the gasifier, it is usually subjected to a
17 cooling and cleaning operation involving a scrubbing technique. The syngas from the
18 gasifier is first introduced into a scrubber and contacted with a water spray which not
19 only cools the gas but also removes particulate and ionic constituents from the synthesis
20 gas. After removing the particulates and cooling the syngas, the cooled gas is then
21 treated to desulfurize the gas prior to utilization of the synthesis gas.

22 The synthesis gas acid gas removal facilities using either amine or physical
23 solvents, removes the acid gases, particularly hydrogen sulfide. The acid gas removal
24 facilities typically operate at lower temperatures. After the synthesis gas is cooled to
25 below about 130° C, preferably below about 90° C, the contaminants in the gas,
26 especially sulfur compounds and acid gases, can be readily removed. The synthesis gas is
27 contacted with the solvent in an acid gas removal contactor. Said contactor may be of
28 any type known to the art, including trays or a packed column. Operation of such an acid
29 removal contactor is well known in the art. The cleaned syngas can be used for many
30 downstream processing. The degree of acid gas removal varies with the downstream use
31 of syngas. The recovered acid gases are send to various recovery processes.

1
2 After being processed in the acid gas removal step, the syngas is sent to a
3 hydrocarbon synthesis reactor, such as a Fischer-Tropsch reactor, where it is contacted
4 with a hydrocarbon synthesis catalyst. Hydrocarbon synthesis catalyst converts synthesis
5 gas into hydrocarbon products. Common catalysts are cobalt and iron on an alumina
6 support. Other Group VIII metals such as ruthenium and osmium are also active. Other
7 single metals that have been investigated as catalysts include rhenium, molybdenum, and
8 chromium. The activities of these catalysts are commonly enhanced by the addition of a
9 variety of metals, including copper, cerium, rhenium, manganese, platinum, iridium,
10 rhodium, molybdenum, tungsten, ruthenium or zirconium. Many other metals can be
11 used, and it is within the scope of this invention to include all catalysts that convert
12 synthesis gas in to hydrocarbon products. See US Patents 5,780,391, 5,162,284,
13 5,102,581, 4,801,573, and 4,686,238 for illustrations of some of the various types of
14 catalyst that can be used to produce hydrocarbons from synthesis gas. The entire
15 disclosures of the above referenced patents are hereby incorporated by reference and
16 relied upon. The wide range of catalysts and catalyst modifications disclosed in the art
17 directly correspond to an equally wide range of conversion conditions in the hydrocarbon
18 synthesis reactor. Catalyst selection can provide some flexibility toward obtaining
19 selected types of products, and some control over their molecular weight distribution.

20 The types and amounts of reaction products obtained via Fischer-Tropsch
21 synthesis varies upon many conditions, such as reactor type, process conditions, and type
22 of Fischer-Tropsch synthesis catalyst used. There are four main types of F-T reactors
23 being used commercially: tubular fixed bed reactors, entrained bed reactors, fixed-
24 fluidized bed reactors and slurry bubble column reactors. These reactors can operate in
25 both high and low temperature Fischer Tropsch processes. There are generally two types
26 of Fischer Tropsch synthesis catalysts, cobalt based and iron based catalysts. Typical
27 products of the Fischer-Tropsch reaction include hydrocarbons from C₁ to C₂₀₀ or higher,
28 with the bulk of the hydrocarbons product being in the C₁ to C₅₀ range with chain limiting
29 catalyst. Most of the hydrocarbons produced are mixtures of olefins and paraffins. The
30 Fischer-Tropsch reaction also produces varying amounts of carbon dioxide, water, and
31 oxygenated components, including acids such as acetic acid, formic acid, propionic acid;

1 alcohols such as methyl alcohol, ethyl alcohol, propyl alcohol, and longer chained
2 alcohols; aldehydes, ketones and esters. Typically, these oxygenated components
3 comprise 1 to 20 weight percent of the Fischer-Tropsch reaction product, and because of
4 their water-soluble nature are commonly found in the wastewater product of a Fischer-
5 Tropsch reactor. Some of the oxygenated compounds are also found in hydrocarbon
6 phase. The amount of gaseous hydrocarbons, paraffin, olefins, CO₂, oxygenates, liquid
7 hydrocarbons, water, etc. depends on the type of reactor, catalyst employed and process
8 conditions. For example, iron catalysts generally produce longer chain hydrocarbons that
9 are more olefinic, produce less amount of water, higher amounts of oxygenates and
10 higher amounts of CO₂ as compared to cobalt catalyst. The Fischer-Tropsch reaction
11 products are commonly divided into separate streams of tail-gas, liquid hydrocarbons,
12 and wastewater.

13 The Fischer-Tropsch liquid hydrocarbon stream (light and heavy) is the desired
14 product of the hydrocarbon synthesis reactor system. This stream comprises any
15 condensed hydrocarbons that have been separated from the condensed wastewater stream
16 or removed directly from the reactor. This stream typically includes hydrocarbons chains
17 from C₅ to C₂₀₀ or higher.

18 The Fischer-Tropsch liquid wastewater stream is the water product of the
19 hydrocarbon synthesis reactor system that has been condensed and separated from the
20 light Fischer-Tropsch liquids. This wastewater stream is usually comprised of water and
21 the water soluble oxygenated components such as acids, alcohols, aldehydes, ketones and
22 esters. Small amounts of hydrocarbons can also be found in the wastewater stream,
23 subject to their solubility at the temperatures and pressures at which the condensation
24 takes place. This wastewater stream is normally passed to a water treatment facility
25 where it undergoes typical water treatment steps known in the art, such as anaerobic
26 digestion and biological oxidation, in order to remove the contaminants and produce
27 clean water for disposal or use.

28 The Fischer-Tropsch tail-gas stream is the gaseous product of a Fischer-Tropsch
29 reactor that does not condense when the reaction products are cooled. The tail-gas is
30 typically comprised of unconverted syngas and uncondensed products, typically CO, H₂,

1 CO₂, gaseous hydrocarbons (C₁-C₅), H₂O, N₂, Ar, and, depending on the catalyst, other
2 compounds and hydrocarbons.

3 Water is known to be a powerful inhibitor in the Fischer-Tropsch synthesis.
4 Carbon dioxide is also an inhibitor, but very much weaker than water. This is why it is
5 desirable to remove CO₂ from the syngas prior to processing in a Fischer-Tropsch
6 reactor. Water is generally produced by the primary step in the conversion process from
7 equation (1) above, but for iron catalyst much of the water is consumed by the reversible
8 water gas shift reaction from equation (2) above. For cobalt catalyst the reverse water
9 gas shift is not predominant. Thus, regardless of whether the selected hydrocarbon
10 synthesis catalyst produces primarily H₂O, from equation (1), or CO₂, from equation (2),
11 CO₂ is usually a significant component of the tail-gas. Generally, depending on the
12 conversion of the syngas obtained in the Fischer Tropsch synthesis, the tail gas also
13 contains large amounts of unconverted syngas. Typically, the tail-gas is recycled back to
14 the syngas feed stream to the Fischer-Tropsch reactor to improve the liquid product yield.

15 Depending on the Fischer-Tropsch catalyst employed, the tail-gas may also
16 contain varying amounts of hydrocarbons. Recycling the tail-gas back to the gasifier can
17 then convert these hydrocarbons into syngas, thus producing another step to increase the
18 overall yield of the desired Fischer-Tropsch liquid hydrocarbon product.

19 Recycling the tail-gas to the gasifier and/or to the Fischer-Tropsch reactor
20 increases the conversion to Fischer-Tropsch liquid hydrocarbons. However, the cost of
21 the related and downstream equipment also increases. Therefore, a third alternative for
22 the tail-gas, namely power generation, may also provide an economic alternative to
23 recycling the tail-gas back into the integrated gasification/Fischer-Tropsch process. The
24 tail-gas is combusted and the combusted gas is used to produce power directly by
25 expanding the combusted gas through a gas turbine, or indirectly by generation of steam
26 and expansion of that steam through a turbine. Commonly, the gasifier syngas product is
27 used in this manner for power production. It is possible that if a fraction of syngas is
28 used for power generation and fraction used for Fischer Tropsch synthesis, the syngas
29 and the tail-gas could be combined with it prior to combustion in the gas turbine. For gas
30 turbine, the BTU value and the composition of the feedgas are key parameters for
31 determining if sending the tail-gas to a gas turbine is a viable alternative. This altrenative

1 is also influenced by the amount of tail-gas that is recycled to the gasifier and/or the
2 Fischer-Tropsch reactor.

3 Thus, the tail-gas could be individually recycled to the gasifier or the Fischer-
4 Tropsch reactor or sent to the gas turbine. Otherwise, the tail-gas could be sent in some
5 combination, and the flow split to two alternatives, or to all three alternatives. The
6 specifics of each project such as the catalyst used, feedstock used, the price of power, the
7 price and desired composition of the Fischer-Tropsch liquids, and the price of the
8 carbonaceous feedstock are all items to be considered in determining the optimum
9 arrangement for tail-gas utilization.

10 Referring now to FIG. 1, solid carbonaceous fuel 2 and water 4 are sent to a slurry
11 preparation step 6 to produce liquefied solid carbonaceous feedstock 8. For the gaseous
12 and liquid feed slurry preparation step 6 will not be necessary and feedstock 8 will be the
13 gaseous or liquid feed. The feedstock 8 is then sent to gasifier 10, along with oxygen 14,
14 usually from an air separation unit 12, and steam 16, used as a temperature moderator.
15 At least a portion 42 of the tail-gas product 32 or the entire tail gas stream 32 from the
16 downstream Fischer-Tropsch reactor 28 is also sent to the gasifier 10. The gasifier 10
17 syngas product 18 is then sent to acid gas unit 20, where a substantial portion of the
18 impurities of the syngas 18 are removed. A portion of the sweetened syngas 22 can then
19 be sent to power block 24, where it is likely to be combusted and expanded across a
20 turbine to generate power, and/or is used to produce steam that can also be used to
21 generate power. It is possible that all of the syngas from the acid gas removal unit 20 is
22 sent to the Fischer Tropsch unit. Hence either some or all of the portion of the
23 sweetened syngas 26 is sent to Fischer-Tropsch reactor 28, where it is reacted with a
24 catalyst to from wastewater 29, liquid synthetic hydrocarbons 30, and tail-gas 32. There
25 are two alternates with tail gas 32. One alternate is to process tail gas through the second
26 acid gas removal unit to remove CO₂. The second alternate is to send tail-gas as it Is
27 without CO₂ removal. In the first alternate the tail-gas 32 is processed in a second acid
28 gas unit 34, where a substantial portion of the CO₂ present in the tail-gas 32 is removed.
29 The sweetened tail-gas 36 can then be divided among three options: 1) recycled 38 back
30 to the Fischer-Tropsch reactor 28 for additional hydrocarbon synthesis; 2) sent to the
31 power block 24 for additional power generation; and at least 3) recycled back to the

1 gasifier 10 for additional syngas production. In the second alternate the tail-gas 32 can be
2 divided among two options: 1) recycled 46 directly to the gasifier 10 for additional
3 syngas production; and 2) recycled 44 to the power block 24 for additional power
4 generation. Each of the above options are viable as whole or in combinations with other.

5 While the devices, compositions and methods of this invention have been
6 described in terms of preferred embodiments, it will be apparent to those of skill in the art
7 that variations may be applied to the process described herein without departing from the
8 concept and scope of the invention. All such similar substitutes and modifications
9 apparent to those skilled in the art are deemed to be within the scope and concept of the
10 invention as it is set out in the following claims.